

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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President Obama Calls on China to Release Jailed Peace Prize Winner

By MacKenzie C. Babb
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama is calling on the Chinese government to release from prison dissident Liu Xiaobo, who won the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize for his fight for democracy and human rights in China.

Obama, whose commitment to nuclear arms control and nonproliferation earned him last year's Nobel Peace Prize, praised Liu for sacrificing his freedom for his beliefs. Liu was sentenced in December to 11 years in prison for subversion of state power after he led the writing of Charter 08, a manifesto on human rights and political reform in China.

"The Nobel Committee has chosen someone who has been an eloquent and courageous spokesman for the advance of universal values through peaceful and nonviolent means," Obama said October 8 at the White House after the announcement of the 2010 Peace Prize in Oslo, Norway.

Obama commended Liu's "support for democracy, human rights and the rule of law."

Liu's win drew a strong reaction from China. A Chinese foreign ministry spokesman said awarding the honor to Liu was "blasphemy against the peace prize" that could harm relations between China and Norway.

"Liu Xiaobo is a convicted criminal sentenced to jail by Chinese justice. His acts are in complete contradiction to the purpose of the Nobel Peace Prize," spokesman Ma Zhaoxu said.

The human rights group Amnesty International called on China to release all "prisoners of conscience" following the win.

"Liu Xiaobo is a worthy winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. We hope it will keep the spotlight on the struggle for fundamental freedoms and concrete protection of human rights that Liu Xiaobo and many other activists in China are dedicated to," said Catherine Baber, deputy Asia-Pacific director at Amnesty International.

The 54-year-old intellectual and author has long been an outspoken critic of China's communist regime, his activism dating back to his involvement in the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests.

His wife, Liu Xia, expressed her happiness about the win and said she would tell her husband during a jail visit

October 9.

Retired South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu and the Dalai Lama, both former Peace Prize winners, were among a group of intellectuals who publicly urged the Nobel Committee to give the prize to Liu after he was sentenced.

Secretary Clinton Travels to Balkans, NATO Meetings

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton is making a three-nation swing through the Balkans to show continuing U.S. support as the Balkan countries work to build democratic and prosperous nations and integrate into the European Union, says a senior U.S. diplomat.

Clinton travels October 11-14 to Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia and Kosovo before making a final stop in Brussels, Belgium. In Brussels, Clinton will be joined by Defense Secretary Robert Gates to attend a NATO foreign and defense ministers' meeting. They are expected to discuss the new long-term strategy for NATO in the 21st century and an update on the NATO-supported mission in Afghanistan.

Assistant Secretary of State Philip Gordon said Clinton will hold consultations with European Council President Herman Van Rompuy and European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton. These meetings are part of the preparations for the November U.S.-European Union Summit in Lisbon. Clinton also will meet with European Parliament President Jerzy Buzek.

President Obama will attend the NATO Summit and the U.S.-EU Summit, both in Lisbon, November 19-20.

At an October 8 press briefing, Gordon said the United States is committed to seeing the Balkan states achieve full integration into the European and Euro-Atlantic communities.

"We have seen in other parts of Europe that the incentive of EU membership has encouraged countries to reform, to combat corruption, to reform their economies, to make peace with their neighbors," he said. "That dynamic will be important in this case as well."

Gordon, who is the assistant secretary of state for European and Eurasian affairs, said Europeans agree that the future of the Balkans is in the European Union. The issue will be part of Clinton's discussions with EU leaders in Brussels, he said.

"In the Balkans, the secretary will meet with a range of government officials, civil society representatives, and she will attend events with citizens of these countries," Gordon told reporters in a conference call. "She will take stock of progress in the region, exchange ideas and engage with these groups on a range of issues."

On October 12, Clinton will meet with the Bosnian tri-presidency in Sarajevo and with Valentin Inzko, who is the high representative for Bosnia-Herzegovina and also the EU special representative in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In addition, Clinton will meet with newly elected member of the tri-presidency Bakir Izetbegovic and other leaders, Gordon said.

Later in Belgrade, the secretary will meet with Serbian President Boris Tadic, Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic and Defense Minister Dragan Šutanova.

And October 13 in Kosovo, the secretary will meet privately with Acting President Jakup Krasniqi, who is chairman of the Kosovo Assembly, Prime Minister Hashim Thaçi and Foreign Minister Skënder Hyseni, Gordon said.

During her travel in Kosovo, the secretary will visit Gracanici, a Serb-majority municipality near Pristina, where she will meet with municipal leaders in the Kosovo Serb community. When she returns to Pristina, Clinton will meet with women's leaders, other civil society leaders and youth from all ethnic groups.

Gordon said the secretary is going to Gracanici "to meet with municipal leaders who are Serbs, and this is a sign of our engagement with all communities in Kosovo. We have been absolutely clear from the start that we strongly support Kosovo's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, but we have also encouraged Kosovo to make sure that all ethnic groups are appropriately represented."

Growing Confidence Empowers Asian Women

By Kathryn McConnell
Staff Writer

Washington — More and more women in Asia, with increasing self-confidence, are starting businesses and entering politics, according to Sally Shelton-Colby, who heads a global coalition the seeks to advance women's issues.

The recent growth in the number of microfinance institutions providing credit has helped women set up businesses, Shelton-Colby said at a recent meeting of South Asian and East Asian women leaders in New Delhi. She said these women business owners increasingly

demand access to larger loans from larger financial institutions to expand their ventures. She said many of them also would benefit from additional business training.

Shelton-Colby directs La Pietra Coalition and was one of several speakers at the meeting, which was hosted in September by Vital Voices, a U.S.-based nongovernmental organization, the U.S. State Department and corporate sponsors. La Pietra is an initiative of Vital Voices.

The event was scheduled to coincide with the 15-year anniversary of a United Nations conference on women in Beijing, which sought to work for legal and social changes to ensure that women and girls can contribute fully to their societies. At a U.N. meeting after that conference, 189 world leaders pledged to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. They committed to achieve this and seven other objectives known as the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

At the September New Delhi meeting, more than 250 social workers, journalists, lawyers, government officials and business owners from 24 countries discussed the critical role women can play in South and East Asia's economic, political and social growth.

Following the meeting, Beth Brooke, a U.S.-based executive with the global business consulting company Ernst & Young, said that while Asian women have more access to credit, progress is too slow. She called on governments to fully enact gender equality in their business laws.

But Brooke also said Asian women are making greater progress than men in learning English. Language skills enable them to work in call centers more effectively than men, she said. (Call centers are centralized offices where workers field consumer assistance calls and make sales calls for multinational or local companies.)

Unlike Brooke, Shelton-Colby sees "momentum behind gender and women's rights now." She cites an increasing amount of research from organizations like the World Bank that links women's rights to economic growth as a factor in this momentum.

During the New Delhi meeting, Vital Voices posted some of the speakers' comments on its blog. Jaspal Bindra, chief executive of Standard Chartered Bank in Asia, is quoted as saying that his industry is experiencing "a huge revolution" by customizing loan services for startup women entrepreneurs who have little access to other forms of credit. "We are trying to create a mindset which is more favorable to women — a mindset which sees women's future potential," he said.

Brooke cited Ernst & Young's program for entrepreneurial women and a program by the global banking and securities company Goldman Sachs to help women. And she said that technology is helping women connect with each other to network and share ideas and experiences. As more women enter the business sector, they become encouraging mentors for other women.

ASIAN WOMEN IN POLITICS

In Asia and elsewhere, some governments are enacting laws requiring that set numbers of elected and appointed officials be women.

In India, according to Shelton-Colby, the national parliament passed a law requiring that around 30 percent of seats on municipal councils, or panchayats, be reserved for women.

Women officeholders are focusing on bringing potable water, irrigation, better schools and efficient garbage disposal systems to local areas in India, according to Shelton-Colby.

"Around the world, women are blazing new trails and triumphing over long-entrenched obstacles to women's progress in order to create a better world. Despite a solid record of advances, our work is by no means done," Melanne Verveer, U.S. ambassador-at-large for global women's issues, said in New Delhi.

International Cooperation Brings South Africa Environmental Data

Washington — South African researchers are benefitting from a unique partnership between NASA and agencies in Africa and Europe that is sending more than 30 terabytes of satellite data to support sustainable development and environmental applications in Africa, the U.S. space agency announced October 6.

One of the instruments on board NASA's Terra satellite provides observations of Africa's surface and atmosphere, including vegetation structure, airborne pollution particles, cloud heights and winds. This data will be accessible through a distribution center in Africa to users who cannot remotely download the large data files because of limitations in the continent's Internet infrastructure.

Terra's multi-angle imaging spectroradiometer (MISR), which provides the data, was built and is managed by NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) in Pasadena, California. NASA's Langley Research Center in Hampton, Virginia, processes and distributes the data.

The MISR has measured the Earth's surface and atmosphere continuously for more than a decade, observing the sunlit portion of Earth and viewing the entire globe between 82 degrees north latitude and 82 degrees south every nine days. The instrument collects images from nine widely spaced view angles rather than a single perspective.

The partnership began in spring 2008, when MISR science team member Michel Verstraete of the Institute for Environment and Sustainability at the European Commission's Joint Research Centre participated in an intensive field campaign by South Africa's Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) to study the environment around Kruger National Park, a major wildlife reserve in South Africa. The researchers studied the area using direct, airborne and space-based measurements. Verstraete learned of widespread interest of the South African research community in remote-sensing applications.

In response, the Institute for Environment and Sustainability and CSIR signed an agreement in July 2008 to facilitate the interaction and exchange of people, knowledge, data and software. NASA joined the partnership in 2009.

"NASA is committed to helping governments, organizations and researchers around the world make effective use of Earth observation data to aid in environmental decision making," said Hal Maring, a program manager in NASA's Earth Science Division in Washington. "These efforts support the goals of the Group on Earth Observations, a partnership of international agencies that promotes collaborative use of Earth science data."

NASA became involved in the collaboration after a training workshop for MISR users in Cape Town, South Africa, organized by JPL and Langley Research Center sparked interest in the potential use of MISR data. It soon became apparent that accessing a large volume of data was a major hurdle in developing countries generally and particularly in Africa. Even though Internet connectivity in Africa has improved greatly in recent years, access and bandwidth remain too limited to support downloading vast data files. This led CSIR to host the data directly.

CSIR, based in Pretoria, South Africa, will distribute the data at no charge to the research community in the region. CSIR also will facilitate access to the large volume of MISR data as part of its strategy of educating, training and transferring knowledge to the southern African research community.

"The data transfer can be seen as a birthday present from NASA to the newly formed South African National Space

Agency,” said Bob Scholes, CSIR research group leader for ecosystem processes and dynamics. “It will kick-start a new generation of high-quality land surface products, with applications in climate change and avoiding desertification.”

NASA shipped most of the data on high-density tapes this summer. The agencies will ensure the database stays updated with current MISR observations by upgrading connectivity and facilitating sharing of data among participating academic and research institutions.

“This multiparty collaboration will significantly strengthen academic and research institutions in southern Africa and support sustainable development of the entire subcontinent,” said Verstraete, who will spend six months in southern Africa in 2011 to help the regional remote-sensing community use the data.

World Food Day Marks Its 30th Year of Fighting Hunger

By Phyllis McIntosh
Special Correspondent

Washington — In a famous speech in 1941, U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt cited four essential human freedoms. The freedom from want was included, along with freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and freedom from fear.

Two years later, during the darkest days of World War II, Roosevelt arranged a conference at Hot Springs, Virginia, where 44 nations committed to founding a permanent organization that would work to ensure the world’s population would not want for food. The result was the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), established in 1945 as an agency of the newly chartered United Nations.

In 1979, the FAO proclaimed an annual World Food Day to unite people in the struggle against hunger, poverty and malnutrition. Every year since 1981, the day has been observed by more than 150 nations on October 16, the anniversary of the founding of the FAO. The theme for 2010, the 30th observance, is “United Against Hunger” in recognition of the work by governments, organizations and individuals.

FAO’s celebrity Goodwill Ambassadors — American athlete Carl Lewis and Indonesian singer Anggun — will help spread the message about world hunger on World Food Day and beyond. But mostly, World Food Day is a local event, observed in thousands of communities through such activities as food drives, creation of neighborhood gardens and student poster and essay contests.

In the United States, some 450 organizations sponsor projects to mark the day. A 20-year tradition at Colorado State University is Cans around the Oval, a campus-wide event that began with the aim of collecting enough canned food to encircle the central campus area known as the Oval. In 2009, more than 150 campus groups collected 90,000 pounds of food — enough to circle the Oval 45 times — and \$27,000 in financial donations for local food banks. “It’s a way for students to connect to the community, to open our hearts to people who are struggling,” said Colorado State sophomore Pilar Delgado, who is helping to organize this year’s event.

Kids against Hunger, a Minnesota organization that enlists children to package food to send to hungry people in 40 countries, urges its 80 locations to hold World Food Day packaging events. The goal is for each participating center to package 100,000 meals.

“It’s a bottom-up movement,” said Edgardo Valenzuela, coordinator of World Food Day for the FAO in Rome. “We just provide the global framework, and people do what they can.” Valenzuela sees the observance as “a day for reflection, a day to see that we have not done enough, a day for everyone to ask, ‘Am I part of the problem or part of the solution?’”

The 30th observance of World Food Day is especially significant because in 2009 the world reached a tragic threshold: A record number — 1 billion people, almost one-sixth of the human race — were living in hunger in 2009. (In an encouraging trend, the number dipped just under a billion in 2010.) FAO’s goal is to cut the toll in half by 2015.

To give people worldwide a chance to express moral outrage at the extent of hunger, the FAO launched a year-long online petition drive. Visitors to social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are urged to log onto www.1billionhungry.org and sign a petition calling on governments to make elimination of hunger their top priority. The FAO expects to collect more than a million signatures by the close of the campaign at the end of November.

At the opening ceremonies for World Food Day 2010 in Rome, the FAO will posthumously honor Norman Borlaug, creator of the World Food Prize, which is awarded for accomplishments in food and agriculture. The award is presented each year in conjunction with World Food Day.

A winner of this year’s prize, David Beckmann, president of Bread for the World, commends the FAO for efforts to feed the hungry even during current economic difficulties. “In times of sudden shortages, it is important that we have effective safety nets in place, but they must

work in concert with agricultural development programs that enable recipients to graduate to self-sufficiency," he said.

"This World Food Day, we need to increase our efforts to halve hunger by helping poor famers produce more food, reducing maternal and child malnutrition, and making foreign aid more effective," he said.

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